

surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus having an exit into a clean room environment.

2. (Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the pasteurization apparatus is selected from the group consisting of an impingement oven, a steam tunnel, an ultra violet light tunnel, and radurization equipment.

3. (Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1, further comprising:
chilling the potato pieces in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.

4. (Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1, further comprising:
aseptically packaging the potato pieces in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.

5. (Amended) A method in accordance with Claim 1, further comprising:
packaging the potato pieces in a modified atmosphere in a clean room environment after the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces.

7. (Amended) A method of preparing French fried potato pieces comprising the steps of:
obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces;

storing the frozen par-fried potato pieces; and

surface pasteurizing the potato pieces in a pasteurization apparatus having an exit into a clean room environment, the surface pasteurizing providing at least one final microbial count selected from the group consisting of:

less than 1.0-3.0 log CFU/g aerobic plate count;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g coliforms;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Escherichia coli*;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g *Staphylococcus aureus*;

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g molds; and

less than 1.0 to 1.0 log CFU/g yeasts;

wherein the potato pieces are negative for *Listeria monocytogenes*,

Salmonella, *Clostridium botulinum*, *Escherichia coli* O157:H7, and *Staphylococcus aureus*.

Please add new claims 8-13 as follows:

8. (New) A method in accordance with Claim 5, wherein the modified atmosphere includes food grade oxygen, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, argon, sulfur dioxide, and mixtures thereof.

9. (New) A method in accordance with Claim 8, wherein the modified atmosphere includes from about 0% to about 5.0% O₂, from about 0% to about 15.0% CO₂, and from about 0% to about 80% N₂.

10. (New) A method in accordance with Claim 9, wherein the modified atmosphere includes 80% nitrogen, 10-15% carbon dioxide, and 0-5% oxygen.

11. (New) A method in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces is subsequent to the step of storing the frozen par fried potato pieces.

12. (New) A method in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the step of obtaining frozen, par-fried potato pieces includes lowering a temperature of the par-fried potato pieces to less than 24 °F.

13. (New) A method in accordance with Claim 1, further comprising transporting the frozen par fried potato pieces from a first location where the step of obtaining frozen par, fried potato pieces occurs to a second location where the step of surface pasteurizing the potato pieces occurs, the second location off-site from the first location.

14. (New) A method in accordance with Claim 1, wherein the method manages the inventory of French fried potatoes having an extended shelf life at a refrigerated temperature and having a reduced reconstitution time.